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ABSTRACT

The document presents a collection of selected reflections by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on India's youth, their opportunities, and their future. Titles for the selections include: (1) Youth and Common Aspirations; (2) Youth and the Future; (3) Youth and Freedom; (4) Youth and the Questing Spirit; (5) Youth and Modernization; (6) Youth and Society; (7) Youth and Education; (8) Youth and Opportunities; (9) Youth and Attitudes; (10) Youth and Hard Work; (11) Youth and Self-Reliance; (12) Youth and Renewal. (LH)

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youth
the nation's strength

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A COLLECTION OF SELECT REFLECTIONS OF PRIME MINISTER, SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI, ON THE ASPIRATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF YOUTH AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THEM IN THE BUILDING OF A STRONG, DISCIP-LINED AND SELF-RELIANT INDIA

YOUTH and ...

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youth and ...

.. common aspirations

We are citizens of an ancient country which is now becoming a modern one. We would like to build up this country in such a manner that if India's name is mentioned anywhere or if her citizens go anywhere, there goes with them a new light, a new strength and a new ideology.

With all the problems of India, you inherit a great heritage and a glorious vision. Nothing worthwhile is achieved without effort and hard work. It has been said that the builders of joy are the children of sorrow. It is for you to build a society free from want; a society which can bring about change through law and consent; a society which finds fulfilment in the happiness and equality of its citizens; a society which ensures a life of enlightenment and at the same time preserves its ancient values.

The basic question before us today is what type of society we want to build. It is not merely a question of much the national or the per capita income will go up but how one Indian will deal with another. Will he regard all his countrymen as equal; will he believe that some people have more rights than others, if there are differences which are not unlikely in any society, how they will be resolved — by resort to violence or through discussion and understanding ?

I think that democracy can only be understood if you look at it in this (large) framework. There can be no democracy if you are looking backward. There can be no democracy if you have a communal outlook and you have barriers between man and man, citizen and citizen. There can be no democracy if you do not have socialism, because democracy and inequality cannot co-exist. Hence, if you want democracy in our country, and I believe we are pledged to it, you have to remember that it is not a matter of parliamentary institutions. We have to see that the feeling of democracy, the involvement or participation of the people, is not confined to voting once in five years for Parliament or for any other local bodies or other elections, but it is a genuine participation in the programmes of our country. I believe the spirit is there in our country, but we have not made sufficient effort to harness it, to galvanise it.

The youth have a special role to play in this process of change, adaptation and growth. Many progressive ideas are embodied in our Constitution. But our society is still far from accepting these ideas completely. We have to convert these ideas from mere intention into concrete realities. This cannot be done merely by exhortation or enforcement. Each one of us has to make these ideas and values a part of his or her mental make-up. Only then will these values find genuine expression in our action. We must begin with ourselves and not wait for others to set an example. This will require a certain degree of moral courage, a certain freedom from petty concerns about personal convenience and comfort.

The youth are the backbone of India. The strength of the nation depends on their strength. There is ferment in the minds of the youth in India and elsewhere in the world. There are many reasons for this ferment. Perhaps one reason is that traditional methods cannot provide a solution to problems of the new age. We can provide leadership to the youth only up to a point. From that point, they have to carve out a new path for themselves and for the nation's future. They will have to face many difficulties and challenges. They have either to climb the mountain of difficulties or cut through it. There is no other way. Our hopes are pinned on the youth of India. They can impart strength to the nation in many fields. I have every hope that they will engage in the mighty endeavour of building a great nation. Their energy and their enthusiasm will be a source of inspiration and encouragement to the entire nation.

.. the future

If there is one section above all others who should be our concern – it must be our youth. They are the inheritors of the future. In all things the torch must pass to the next generation.

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Youth has two attributes : energy and idealism. Studies made elsewhere suggest that, generally speaking, a scientist is most creative between the age of 25 and 35. We look to our younger generation to provide the motive force for innovation and creative ideas. It is for them to cut a path to India's future. The conditions for this have to be created, so that our country moves forward with a new determination.

Every citizen should see that he pursues the correct path, that he serves the country and society, and if does that, the society would gather strength. We have to make full use of that strength and knowledge. And I hope that our young men, who are now restless, will become a great source of strength to our society and will be able to give a new leadership to the country. I have full faith in them. Sometimes some of them are led astray but most of them wish to become an asset to their country. So all of us who are now not so young should help these young men.

We can progress only if we work hard. Nothing can be achieved if we keep only complaining and indulging in negative criticism. Our achievements in agricultural production have been possible only because our farmers adopted progressive measures. We have to take several more steps to modernise our ancient society. It does not mean that we should forget our culture; our roots lie in it, and without roots no plant can live. But it is also a fact that no tree looks only downwards towards its roots; it has to look upwards towards the sky to grow, to blossom and to bear fruit. We have also to look up, to fight forces of communalism and linguism that weaken the nation. Above all, the greatest need of the hour is to maintain discipline. In a democracy, it is not only the Government that has to be responsible but every single citizen. We have to see that values change, that attitudes of hard work are developed. Only then will your work among the youth be successful.

.. freedom

A new generation of Indians is coming up. They were not witness to the freedom struggle. They are not aware of the fervour which impelled us to fight for freedom. The responsibility for the nation's progress and development falls on them as much as it falls on those who were associated with the struggle for freedom.

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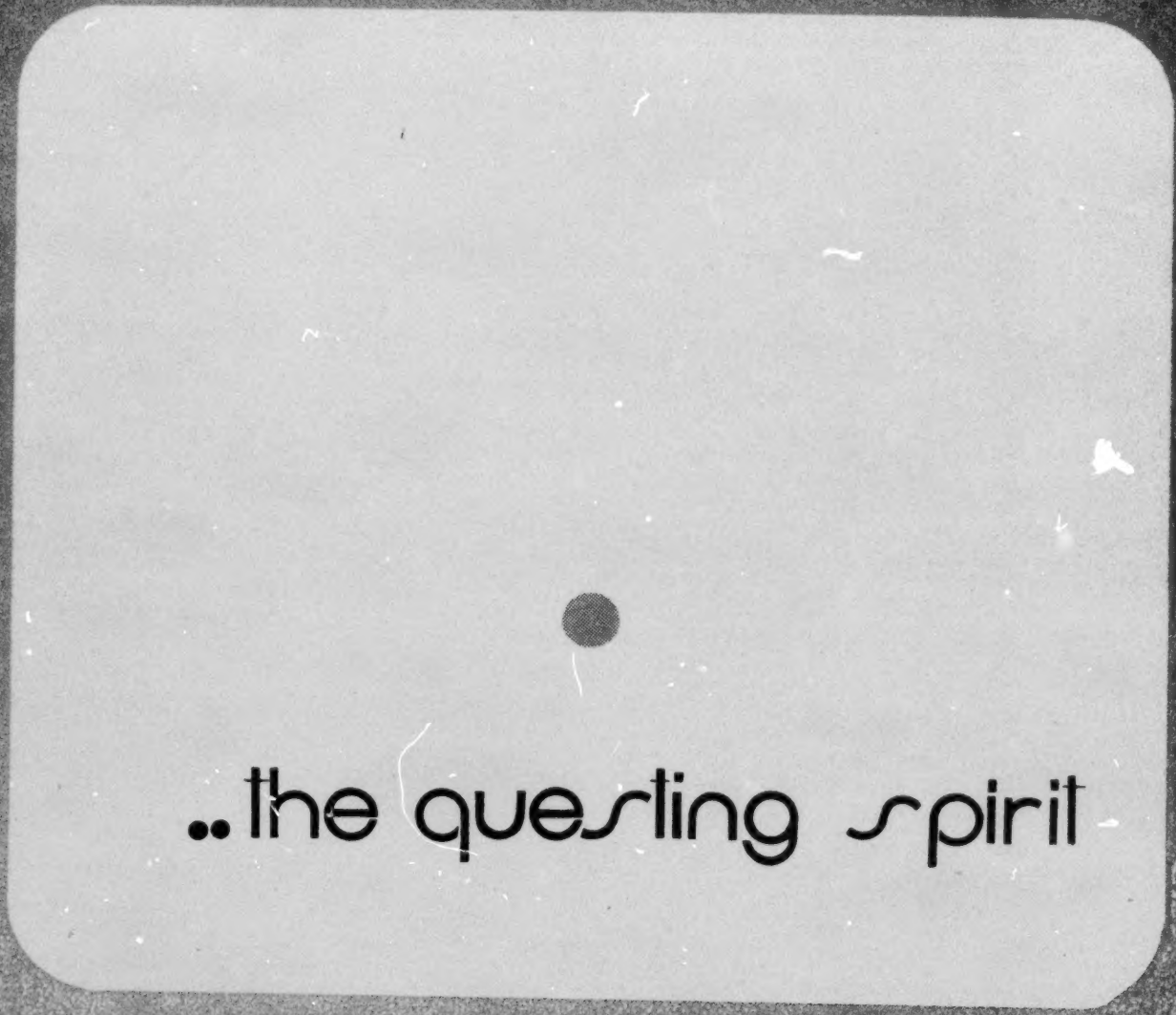
Students have played an important part in the freedom movement of their country, whether in India or abroad. If the student community had not been in the forefront of our struggle for freedom, we would not have achieved the success that we got. For the past many years, we have been trying to strengthen that freedom. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. We must always act so as to strengthen our unity and do so with firmness and courage. Also, these actions of ours should be meaningful for the people as a whole."


..the questing spirit

It has always been the right of the young to ask 'why'. Out of that one word 'why' has arisen philosophy, reform, revolt. Today all the countries are affected by the revolt of the youth. Like all energy, revolt or opposition can be both destructive and creative. It should be indeed the responsibility of the youth to infuse new purpose into our values and bring new dignity to our civilisations.

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What ails us today is our inability to arouse and utilise to the fullest extent the latent power or energies of our people ...

The youth of the country are the single largest repository of this power ... Each one of us has to think for himself and decide what is right and what is wrong. To go on believing in an idea because it has been there for centuries is a kind of laziness. We have to look at every ideal, every value, with a questioning mind in order to understand its relevance to contemporary problems and needs. We should accept only those values and modes of action which will bring strength to our society. The rest we should reject or modify. It is this continuous revaluation, this continuous modification, that distinguishes a live culture from a dead or dying culture.

Between the outlook of the young and the outlook of those who are in places of power, governmental or social, there seems to be a gap of non-comprehension. This is true not only of India but the world over. The revolt and the reaction of youth against authority of any kind is a natural process necessary to growth into adulthood. But the urge to revolt is a force which can be used positively or negatively. In its positive form it becomes the will to achievement. It is a dissatisfaction with the times which has led people to seek new answers to old questions, and has produced social, religious, educational and political reformers. In earlier times, it led to the exploration of new areas; and in modern times, mountaineering and other adventurous expeditions are an expression of the same spirit. The same questioning and rejecting spirit has produced new inventions in science, medicine and other fields.

In India today, in fact in most countries, people live in terms of old formulations, old concepts and clichés, which have lost much of their meaning, although other countries sometimes find new description for them, thus giving them a gloss of novelty. In many countries, Governments and people have realised that the old systems of education are no longer adequate, and force of circumstances or the experience of others have urged them to new experimentation. In India today, we need entirely new attitudes. Dead or dying ideas not only obstruct change but can considerably harm individuals as well as nations ...

We cannot be good internationalists unless we are good nationalists first. We cannot do something for the world unless we have first done it for our country. We have to have pride in India, which does not mean that there is nothing wrong. There is much that is weak and evil. It is the task of young people here to see that you distinguish what is there in our culture that we can be proud of, that has given strength to this society for thousands of years to meet far greater challenges than perhaps any other country enabling it to survive in spite of all the vicissitudes of its long history. There must be something in it which has given us the strength. How do we keep that? How do we remove the other things that have attached themselves, but which are obviously evil, which have hampered our progress, which have brought in a narrowness in our thinking?

But we have the challenges right on our door steps. We don't have to go to the mountains or under sea. We have the slums on our door steps, we have the villages on our door step. We have the caste system in every house. So there are the challenges, there are the mountains which we have to climb, the oceans which we have to cross.

.. modernisation

What place can technology have if it does not improve the lives of people everywhere? Can only parts of a nation be modern? Surely that creates double standards and accentuates inequalities. Social mobility is important but we should not encourage, nor can we afford, large scale migration from villages to towns. The western emphasis on labour-saving agriculture is not appropriate to our conditions.

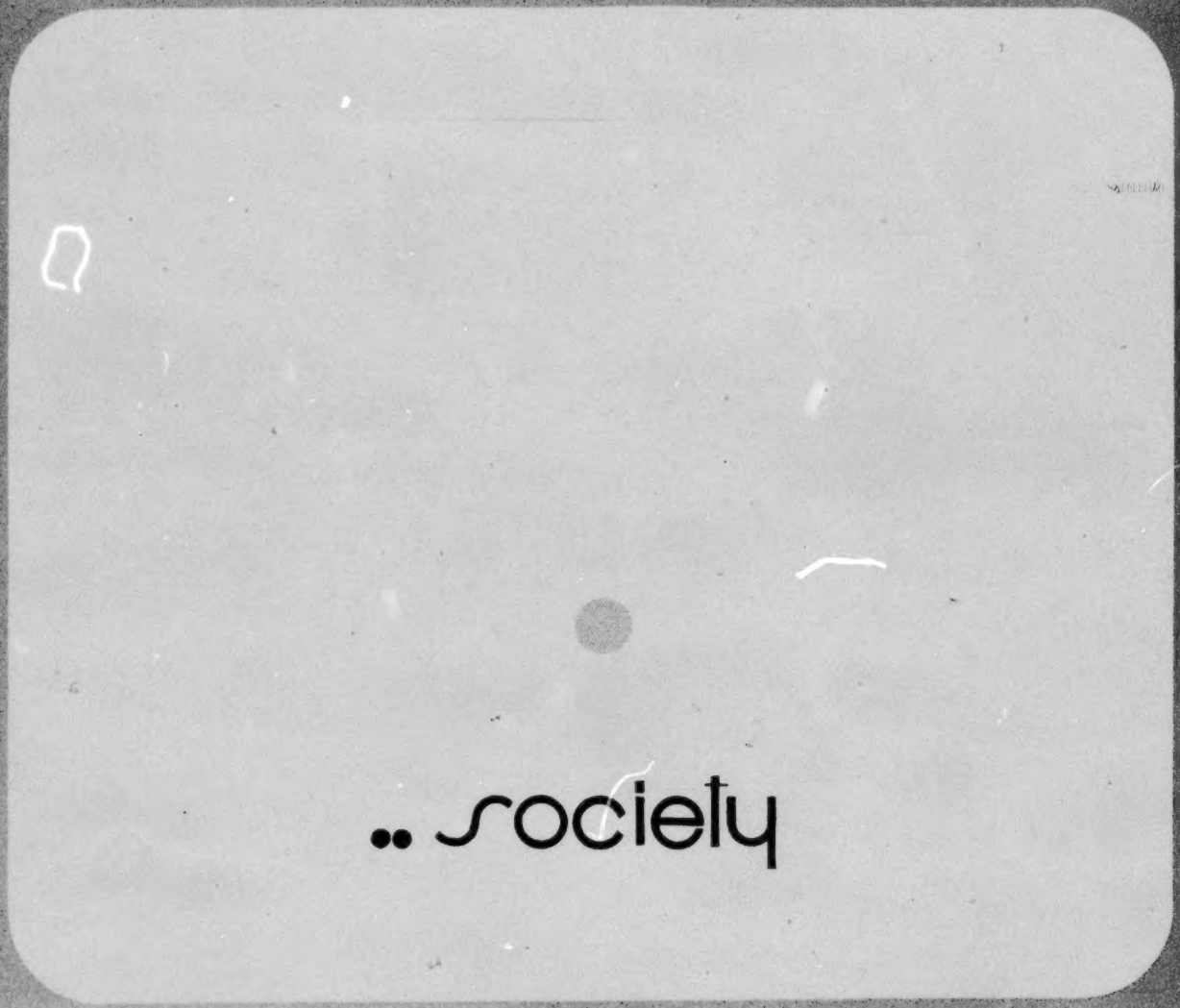
To lighten the burden of our poor people, to make a given amount of money or water or power, to do more work, to evolve a hundred new varieties of tools which could be run by electricity or hand power in villages are some of the tasks awaiting the attention of our brilliant young technologists.

If we want to be a modern strong nation, then we have to make a special effort to see that all those sections of the people, who have not had opportunities of development and progress, they should be helped. Not by other people going and doing things, but by helping them to do things for themselves. The way to tackle them is to start right there in your neighbourhood.

The most important science is the science of living. The pursuit of knowledge is endless. It has followed two streams. What urged man forward were the requirements of survival, and also his insatiable curiosity. There is no conflict between the two. Although they sometimes ran parallel, many times they met and served each other's purpose. Out of the one emerged applied science and from the other fundamental science. In India we need both. Only when we raise the standards of living for the many, shall we be able to create satisfactory conditions for the brilliant few to attain higher goals.

We are facing the biggest challenge of our history today because many things are changing very fast in the world and unless we can keep up with this pace, unless we can keep up with other countries of the world, we will not be able to make the sort of country which founders of our independence dreamt of or which we desire for the younger generation of today. When you work with discipline, with team spirit, in a constructive and creative spirit, then you succeed.

Self-reliance does not mean an inward-looking or isolationist approach, but a policy which ensures that decision-making on key aspects of the pattern and content of development will remain firmly in national hands.


.. society

This occasion (convocation of university graduates) marks a turning point in the lives of the young graduates. You move on to greater responsibility in life. From being receivers you now become givers. The student stage is the stage of preparation. Society owes its young an education. After school and college, the educated young owe society a duty. This duty is to place the skills they have learnt and the knowledge they have earned at the disposal of society.

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It is only when the people, and especially those who have the great privilege of being educated, feel a sense of commitment to the nation's problems, a sense of involvement, that the nation can really go ahead — when they feel that it is worth sacrificing something for the sake of this involvement and for the sake of the larger interests of the country... This is what we want from our teachers, our scholars and our intellectuals. I am sure, that we have these qualities amongst us and if we make a joint effort something good can come out of it.

University women cannot ignore the big gap which exists between the educated women and others not so lucky. To share knowledge and skills with the less-privileged women, to explain new ideas to them, to combat superstition and to safeguard their interests should be the duty of the educated.

Those who have the privilege of such higher study should become torch-bearers of the new awareness; ready to work with humility and sincerity to bring light to the darkest corners of our society. But excellence is incompatible with arrogance, complacence or with idleness. It can remain excellence only through ceaseless striving. To be bigger than himself, a man must constantly stretch his capacity. The more one does, the more one attempts, the more one is capable of doing.

.. education

Education has expanded tremendously. Today the number of children in schools has gone up from 23.4 million in 1951 to 83 million (1971). But I am sorry to say that we have not done as well as we should have in our programme for adult literacy. Without being able to read, a person's world is a limited one, for he cannot share the knowledge and companionship that come with books. We must, and we are, doing more for primary education, to strengthen secondary education and for adult literacy programmes...

At the same time I cannot agree with the common belief in the West that literacy by itself gives greater wisdom or understanding. Our people, illiterate though they may sometimes be, are the inheritors or an ancient culture and philosophy, which have sustained them through the vicissitudes of their long history. Indian voters have shown extraordinary insight and understanding of what goes on around them.

Our education is not in tune with life in the present-day India. Although now our children are learning more about their country than they did before, they still are not committed to the country; they are not given that intimate knowledge that generates a feeling of involvement in the country; they are not given the kind of social attitudes which modern India needs to go ahead...

Education is extremely important but education is not just the acquiring of knowledge. It is changing yourself into a sort of person who can adapt to changing conditions and who can play a significant role in changing society.

There is education, not just for a favoured few but for the masses; unfolding knowledge, opening up new worlds and arousing new desires. But most of today's frustration and restlessness is because our educational systems are too narrow and inflexible to promote the spirit of understanding and tolerance and the vision which is essential to meet the challenges of our changing world.

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Let us not measure the quality of our education by the statistics of pass, failure and wastage, however important these figures may be as official records. The quality of education must be reflected in the quality of life, in its value and grace, in the culture of the social and individual mind and not the least in our intellectual and technological competence to face and master the problems before us... Education must provide the nation with good workers and good managers. More, it should provide thinkers and seekers of light. Education is much more than preparation for a career or a means of acquiring skills for particular professions. The best education is at once a means and a fulfilment. Teachers and students of universities should look upon their intellectual work as the function and expression of their whole being. The major task of our educationists is, therefore, to stress this creative aspect of university life.

Present-day youth is becoming clearer about its personal goals. Educational facilities have expanded. There are more institutions and newer courses of study. Scholarships are more plentiful. Social mobility has increased. Opportunities for travel and access to sources of information have widened. Our young people are taking advantage of these and have, in the process, been both agents of equality and the providers of skills which the nation needs.

We have some universities which are a century old, but most of our universities have been established in the last two decades, in response to the growing yearning for education. Yet education is looked upon not from the point of view of having better human beings but merely as a vehicle for security of employment. The problem of educated unemployment is a grave one. Some of it is certainly due to the recession and our other economic difficulties of the last few years. But part of the blame must also go to our system of education which does not provide specific qualifications; which often inculcates an attitude of mind which hankers after office jobs instead of encouraging self-reliance, resourcefulness and a spirit of adventure.

Young people should achieve a harmony where they will have not a peace which is lifeless, but a peace which is creative and productive, a peace which gives harmony within oneself, which gives one the energy and courage to deal with the many problems that arise all around us and that must arise as the world goes ahead. There is no time which has been without problems and there will be no time which will be without problems. Sometimes it is the same problem in different guises and shapes, sometimes they are new problems; but while there is life, there will be problems and difficulties. So, our education must prepare our young people to meet these problems, to find new answers and to adjust themselves to changing circumstances.

A country's human resources constitute its greatest asset. Attitudes and skills make a nation. Education is the key to both... By 1985, the number of students in schools and colleges will probably be around 17 crore. The expansion of education at all levels is necessary to provide greater opportunity to the individuals, and trained and literate manpower for the nation. However, general education for its own sake is not enough. We intend to lay stress on vocational and professional education. We shall also simultaneously transform the character of the educational system. It is clear that only then will youth respond to the challenge of development and advance.

Unfortunately, education in our country builds just one more wall in a society which is already divided into too many artificial barriers between man and fellow man. If we have an educational system which could combine practical experience with theoretical study, some of this attitude would change and there would be that desire for working together and helping one another which is so essential in today's India. Each one of us must be a worker, regardless of where we happen to be or what work we are doing.

There should be a coming together of the universities and the factories. Lessons learnt in classrooms should be combined with work done in factories or in fields. This would not only produce the right mental attitude amongst our people but give them familiarity with problems of work and problems of society which is so necessary for proper adjustment when they finish their education.

Our educational institutions have largely been fashioned - perhaps wholly fashioned - to impart knowledge which soon becomes obsolete. But education as we know and as the ancients have said - and I think it is a truth that will be true for all times - is not just knowing but it is a becoming. And this is what we should try and achieve in our institutions.

So you come back to the same point - that it depends on your attitude towards life, towards your neighbour as to how you will use your knowledge, how you will learn more and therefore how you will be able to influence the people around you. It is no use your learning something if it is going to be locked up in yourself. It should be used for a purpose and unless you can use it you will not be happy. You can use it only if you are enthusiastic - or concerned - about what is happening around you. And one of the things which modern life has produced is attitude of unconcern and of carelessness. The larger the city, the more of this you find. I think that it is this more than any thing which breeds frustration and unhappiness.

Some of the latest trends in educational thinking outside our country lead to the conclusion that education can never be confined to an institution, whether a school, college or university. It is something that must permeate all one's life, whether one is working in the field, whether one is working in the factory or in an office and that one can really, only get the best out of education when each individual is all the time thinking what he can learn or what he can teach, what has he got to give to the people who are around him and what is he able to take from them. Now this is the base of integration also. Although in other countries this theory is being propagated with regard to narrower point of view, I mean, not narrow, it is a very wide education, but still confined to education, here is India I think it is something that is very necessary because only then can we have a fellow feeling for our neighbours and try to understand them.

We can see today where we are going wrong. Our difficulty is that we have had an educational system which had little contact with life in our country. In spite of Independence the system has not really changed much. It belongs not only to another civilisation it belongs to another century. And we need a minor or even perhaps a major revolution in the whole thinking so that education produces young people who can think on original lines, who have self-confidence. Today many of our young people have ability but they are not sure enough of themselves to be able to do what they think should be done. This is one of the weaknesses of our society.

What is education? I do not know if anybody can find a very clear answer, but there must be some definition. Basically I would say that one of the aspects of education is the ability to distinguish between the good and the bad in every section. Nothing is purely good and nothing is purely bad, but nevertheless there are the shades and we must be able to choose between the shades... I would say that education is a training of all one's faculties to absorb, to adapt and to create. It should guide one towards maturity which means the willing acceptance of responsibility. It should inculcate the spirit of cooperation and helping others, the feeling involved in programmes which are of national importance...

.. opportunities

Youth must have greater opportunity. The young people of India must recognise that they will get from their country tomorrow what they give her today. The nation expects them to aspire and to excel. The worlds of science and art, of thought and action beckon to them. There are new frontiers to cross, new horizons to reach and new goals to achieve.

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In the coming years, we must give new opportunities to our creative youth. We must promote initiative in government and industry, adopt the methods of modern science, and work for more flexibility everywhere. Only then can we respond to the needs of our people.

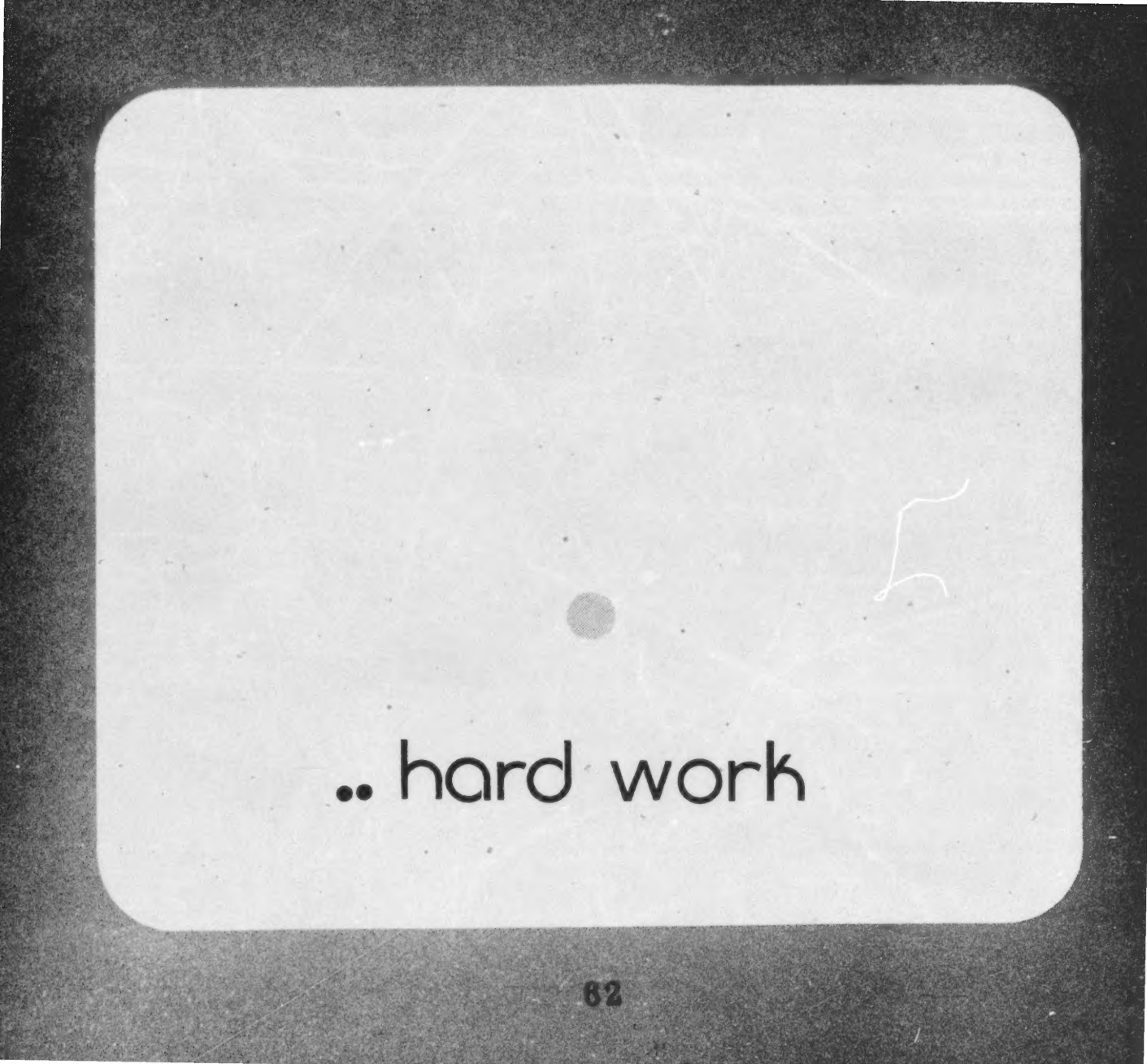
.. attitudes

Today we find restlessness among our youth and others. The restlessness is not peculiar to us alone. This is a universal phenomenon today. To my mind this restlessness is because we are emerging from one age and entering into another. And when such great transformation takes place it is bound to result in some restlessness, sorrow and suffering. We cannot remain stuck to the old order nor can we wish that there should be no change. We want to play our part in this change.

Restlessness exists amongst young people all over the world. Partly, it is due to the specific difficulties which we face here... We are faced with demands which are far in excess of our ability to meet them. This is so because the industrial revolution, which could have given these and other things that the people are asking for, is far from complete. This is a circumstance created by history. We have no control over it. So in such a situation, what do we do? Do we just sit down and say that things are difficult, that things have gone wrong, that nothing can be done? Or do we take the constructive attitude, not the 'down-down' attitude but, if I may say so, the 'up-up' attitude?

Our young people have contributed a great deal to the India of today but there is, if course, far greater amount still to be done. How will you do it? You should not wait for anybody's advice. You must find it for yourself and do it the way you think it should be done. For this you need initiative, resourcefulness, the capacity to think for yourselves, and the ability to take risks and make mistakes, because without mistakes nothing can be achieved. What each generation achieves is based on the experience gained by the mistakes of those who have gone before. So, even a mistake is in a way a step forward. If we do not achieve something, at least we gain the knowledge to help others to go ahead.

We have the problem of unemployment among engineers and other educated people. We are trying to solve this problem. We have to consider how we can set up new industries and provide employment to a large number of people. I would appeal to the educated people not to hanker after government jobs. They should try and create new opportunities for themselves. There is ample scope for them in our developing economy. They should develop a spirit of self-help and self-reliance.


.. hard work

It is not enough for a few at the top to reach outstanding ability. Performance at every level, even the very lowest, must be improved. All of us are part of the huge apparatus of the nation, the efficient working of which is dependent on the smooth functioning of every component. Again, excellence does not necessarily mean doing extraordinary things. It is judged equally by doing ordinary things extraordinarily well.

Better life for the millions can come only through sustained hard work. Every year, lakhs of young men and women come of age and enter the labour market. Unemployment can be solved only if our economy expands. Anything that hinders our recovery and growth is a disservice to youth. We are at present formulating several programmes to increase employment opportunities and to train workers for special skills. Leaders of labour should also take the initiative and act as custodians of our future.

.. self-reliance

We have the problem of educated unemployment. It has arisen partly because our industrial development and other development projects have not been able to keep pace with the rising number of educated young people. Another reason, though small, is that many of our educated young people wish to have only a particular type of job. They would like to have a white collar job. They would like to work in particular places and cities rather than villages, on the mainland rather than on remote islands or in the hills. So, we have a situation where we have areas in India which are in need of engineers, of doctors, of mechanics, and many other such specialised people and yet we have groups here who are unemployed. This is partly

a question of education and also of creating a social consciousness amongst our people. We would like our young men to try more for self-employment. More and more of them should try to set up their own trades and industries and not try only for what they consider to be a secure job. The Government is certainly prepared to give all possible help in this, financial and technical, and I am sure that the nationalised banks will also view with special sympathy any proposal or scheme from young people to take up new lines of production...

Many employment avenues have been suggested, some within the Plan and some outside the Plan. I hope our young men will take advantage of these and explore new ways so that they can stand on their own feet and be self-reliant. The youth in advanced countries have shown how self-reliant they can be.

This is the age of science. This is also the age of the youth. They have to follow new paths. They do not have to look towards anybody else, because those who look towards others for guidance are left behind. We have to show a new path to our young people. They are endowed with courage and determination. It is only by cultivating courage, hope, self-reliance and self-confidence that we can make progress and carry our masses forward.

.. renewal

We are on a journey which is long arduous and we can reach our destination only step by step. Already many steps have been taken on this journey with courage and enthusiasm. When our young men join us in this march they would be able to take us all forward more speedily.

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We have to take determined steps to move forward. All of us should ask ourselves a question every day. Have you done anything for the country? Have you done it honestly and industriously? If you are able to get honest answers to these questions, you will soon find we are able to accelerate the pace of progress of this country...

Winter ends and spring begins. Trees and plants prune themselves of what is old and unwanted and sprout with new life. This is the law of nature. Nations too, if they obey the same law and imbibe new ideas and new thoughts, will always remain youthful and march along the road to progress. I hope you will always keep alive in you the sense of constant renewal and creativity. My good wishes to all of you for a bright future.

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